

30 November 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Conversation with Gertrude McCullough (Osborne)

1. Miss McCullough (the wife of John Osborne, Washington editor of the New Republic and author of "The Nixon Watch") is working on a profile of Mr. Helms for Potomac magazine, and at lunch today asked me a number of questions about the Director's personality, work habits, etc. She said she was only incidentally interested in the Agency and the intelligence business, but rather wanted to get a sharp focus on the Director personally. She said she had talked to a number of people, nearly all of whom were complimentary, but she still couldn't explain what kind of person the Director really is. She began by asking a number of questions about his early life--for example how he happened to get the exclusive interview with Hitler, whether a copy was available, why he soon thereafter moved to Indianapolis, etc. I couldn't throw much light on these matters, and she asked whether he was particularly secretive about his private life. I said no necessarily so but he did value his privacy largely I thought because for much of his adult life he had been involved in the clandestine intelligence business. I also suggested that his years of study and work in Europe might have been a factor, noting that Europeans traditionally are far less talkative about their personal affairs than Americans.

2. In responding to Miss McCullough's questions I mentioned, among other things:

a. The Director's concern to maintain a "low profile" for both himself and the Agency (the fact that he prefers a small deputy's office rather than the more elaborate one John McCone had arranged when he was Director; that he uses an ancient Chrysler as an official car, where his predecessors had travelled in Government Cadillacs, etc.).

b. I described the Director as a man of highly disciplined work habits who paces himself skillfully and doesn't tolerate anything he considers a waste of time. He can say what he has to say clearly in very few words--sometimes rather salty ones--and has very little patience with verbosity.

c. I mentioned the Director's comments on the question, which came up in connection with the Green Beret case, on why it is that the Agency can never sanction assassination no matter what the circumstances.

d. I spoke of the Director's credibility with nearly all factions on the Hill and suggested Miss McCullough talk to various members and staff officers of the Congress to get their firsthand comments.

e. I recalled having heard the Director say that at no time had any top officials from the President on down ever tried to influence the intelligence product no matter how unpleasant the implications might be for this or that Administration policy.

f. I also recalled having heard the Director say all he could do in his job was to call the shots as he sees them, and if this wasn't satisfactory to his superiors he was "the easiest man in town to fire."

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